

# PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALING HANDBOOK

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This handbook is written for individuals who have been enrolled into the AWS Professional Credentialing Program (PC Program). It provides an overview of the Program, including information on the levels of credential, the claims that can be made by those in the Program and requirements and responsibilities of credentialed individuals.

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Levels of Credential .....	2
3. Eligibility Requirements.....	2
4. Professional Credentialing Account Setup.....	3
5. Claims and Logos .....	3
6. Responsibilities .....	4
Code of Conduct .....	4
Disciplinary Policy and Actions.....	4
7. Continuing Contribution Units (CCUs).....	4
Reporting Period.....	5
CCU Hours .....	5
Reporting Credential Maintenance.....	6
Extensions .....	6
8. Fees.....	6
9. Expiration .....	6
10. Renewal .....	6
11. Audits .....	7
12. Appeals.....	7

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is a global membership organization dedicated to advancing water stewardship around the world. As part of this mission, AWS developed The AWS *International Water Stewardship Standard* or *AWS Standard* to enable credible, robust water stewardship that can be independently verified, anywhere in the world. As a full ISEAL<sup>1</sup> member, AWS is committed to an equitable, open and transparent approach to setting and maintaining its standard and we follow their Codes of Good Practice for Standard Setting, Assurance, and Impact Monitoring.

AWS is the standards system owner of the AWS Standard and is responsible for standard setting, capacity building, assurance and claims, and monitoring and evaluation. These programs reinforce each other to ensure that credible, robust implementation of the AWS Standard delivers on the AWS mission.

The AWS Assurance System includes accreditation, training and professional credentialing functions to enable AWS to leverage the competencies of independent third-party entities to support implementation of the Standard. As a result, it is important to develop an international cadre of water stewardship professionals across industry sectors who will ensure credibility in the dissemination and adoption of water stewardship knowledge and expertise. The primary approach to ensure this credibility is through the development of a global water stewardship professional credentialing program. The AWS Professional Credentialing Program (PC Program) assures the delivery of the essential core competencies for the implementation and maintenance of the AWS Standard. The credentials are structured in a tiered manner to reflect progressively increasing levels of awareness and practical knowledge. The Program is built on a platform of three levels of AWS Standard System Training.

This document provides an overview of the PC Program and the AWS PC Portal which is the means through which Professionally Credentialed Individuals engage with AWS and maintain their credential.

## 2. LEVELS OF CREDENTIAL

Three kinds of individual credentials are available (see below). These levels demonstrate different core competencies that increase in knowledge and skill requirements as the individual progresses from the lowest level credential to the highest. The levels correspond to the three levels of AWS Standard System Training and the details are as follows:

- Foundation Professional – AWS Foundation level-trained and exam passed; an instrument for awareness in organizations that are implementing and/or stakeholder advocates for AWS
- Advanced Professional – AWS Advanced level-trained, exam passed and capable of using/applying the AWS Standard within an organization to determine potential value and resource needs for implementation of the AWS Standard
- Specialist Professional – AWS Specialist level-trained, exam passed and experience review for three types of AWS Specialist Professional – trainer, consultant, and/or auditor. This level is recognized by AWS as having the skill sets necessary to train and develop additional credentialed professionals and support certified sites, typically through accredited service providers

## 3. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be professionally credentialed, AWS requires that candidates complete at least the Foundation Level of AWS Training and successfully pass the Foundation Level Exam. Candidates are eligible for a higher

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<sup>1</sup> ISEAL is the global membership organisation for credible sustainability standards. ISEAL members are sustainability standards that meet ISEAL's Codes of Good Practice and promote measurable change through open, rigorous and accessible certification systems. They are supported by international accreditation bodies, which are required to meet accepted international best practice.

level of credential upon completion of Advanced Level Training and Specialist Level Training and passing of the relevant Exam(s).

All candidates must also sign the Code of Conduct and successfully maintain the ongoing credentialing requirements (See Continuing Contribution Units section below), and, if audited by AWS, must provide requested information to evidence this. The Code of Conduct is provided to individuals when they first log in to their account in the AWS PC Portal (see URL in Section 4).

## 4. PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALING ACCOUNT SETUP

Upon successful completion of the relevant exam the new Professional Credentialing Program entrant will receive an email from AWS with instructions on how to access the PC Portal. Once the individual receives this, the three-year period for the relevant level of credential begins. All credentialed individuals are strongly encouraged to log on to their account immediately as individuals will be automatically locked out of their PC Portal account after 45 days of no activation of new accounts.

All credentialed individuals (including new entrants) in good standing can access the PC Portal and their individual account at [pcportal.a4ws.org](http://pcportal.a4ws.org). New entrants will be prompted to enter a password, agree to the terms and conditions and agree to the Code of Conduct. Credentialed individuals will use this portal for reporting Continuing Contribution Units (CCUs), accessing to AWS-approved webinars, submitting questions regarding the PC Program and payment of fees.

## 5. CLAIMS AND LOGOS

Each level of the PC Program has associated AWS branding which is available for individuals to use to communicate about their credential. The logo associated with each level of Credential is available to download from the PC Portal.

The logo must be used in its original format; individuals are not permitted to edit the logo in any way except resizing. Any resizing must be done with respect to the provided format's proportional dimensions with no stretching or distortion or overlay of other images. Claims made in relation to each individual's involvement in the PC Program must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The skills the individual claims to hold must be consistent with their level of credential (see Section 2 – Levels of Credential)
- Any written work by the individual referencing their involvement in the PC Program alongside their AWS PC logo must include the statement provided in the section on Publishing, making clear that views held are that of the individual, not AWS
- Individuals' use of the AWS PC logo must be in line with the values and intent of the AWS PC Program, represented through the Code of Conduct.

Further information can be found in the AWS Claims Policy and Procedure, available to download from the AWS website.

Any individual who misuses their AWS PC logo will be contacted by AWS and asked to either edit the content to correct the misrepresentation or issue a fresh claim with corrected information. Consistent misuse of the AWS branding and/or inaccurate claims related to the PC Program may result in a violation of the Code of Conduct (see Section 6 below) and could result in the individual being removed from the Program.

## 6. RESPONSIBILITIES

### CODE OF CONDUCT

AWS SCIO and its Regional Partners share responsibility for the administration, oversight and integrity of the AWS Standard, AWS Certified sites and Professionally Credentialed Individuals. As such, AWS is dedicated to maintaining the trust and respect of our members, partners and the public through unquestionable integrity, honesty and ethics. As a result, any individual entering our PC Program is required to sign up to our Code of Conduct. In addition to the requirements of the Code of Conduct, individuals shall comply with applicable laws and regulations.

The Code of Conduct states that:

- Individuals shall commit to work collectively to support the AWS mission, the AWS membership and all entities seeking to become better water stewards;
- Individuals shall support the implementation of, and encourage compliance with, the AWS Standard, AWS Certification Requirements, and all other AWS-related policies and procedures;
- Individuals shall act honestly, in good faith and in the best interests of AWS, not engaging in conduct likely to discredit AWS;
- Individuals commit to continuous learning and maintaining accurate and up-to-date information on their credentialing status, as well as the correct use of AWS Intellectual Property, logos and information, in line with relevant Policies;
- Individuals shall use care and diligence in fulfilling the duties of holding an AWS Professional Credential and in exercising the powers attached to their credential; and naturally abide by laws related to the profession and to general public health and safety and carry out their professional work in a competent and objective manner;
- Individuals shall inform the AWS PC Program Administrator of any conflicts, or potential conflicts of interest, arising out of the fulfilment and responsibilities of their credential;
- Individuals shall maintain the privacy and confidentiality of information obtained during their activities unless disclosure is required by law. Such information shall not be used for personal benefit or released to inappropriate parties; and
- Individuals shall contact the AWS PC Program Administrator if they are in doubt about a specific business conduct question or would like to report an infraction.

AWS will promptly investigate any alleged non-compliance with the Code. If an individual is found to have violated the Code of Conduct through this process, they will immediately lose their credential. At the time of revocation, AWS will inform the individual of the time and process to seek reinstatement (dependent on the initial reasons for revocation).

### DISCIPLINARY POLICY AND ACTIONS

If AWS confirms a violation of the Code of Conduct, if the CCUs are not fulfilled, and/or any associated fees are not paid, or if an individual misrepresents the AWS brand through their use of the PC logo, AWS reserves the right to terminate the individual's status pending resolution. AWS and the individual may agree to a suspension of status if the circumstances warrant. The individual has the right to appeal any action in accordance with the AWS complaints and appeals procedure which can be found on the AWS website (<https://a4ws.org/about/comments-complaints-and-appeals/>). See Section 12 for further details.

## 7. CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION UNITS (CCUS)

In order to demonstrate that Professionally Credentialed Individuals are maintaining and building on their AWS water stewardship knowledge and skills, all individuals are required to undertake Continuing Contribution Units (CCUs) each year. The CCUs relate to the range of skill sets required for the three levels of credential and can take several different forms depending on the interest of the individual involved, their area of expertise and the skills and knowledge they require in their role. The purpose of credential maintenance through CCUs is to encourage learning experiences that demonstrate continued competency and up-to-date water stewardship knowledge.

## REPORTING PERIOD

The Credentials are maintained in three-year periods, starting when the credential is earned (the day the new PC individual is notified via email from AWS that they have successfully completed one of the credentialing exams) and ending 3 years minus 1 day from the start date.

## CCU ACTIVITIES

All three levels of credential require a total of 30 units per three-year credentialing period. We strongly recommend that individuals complete at least 10 CCUs in year one to ensure they are gaining the maximum benefit of being part of the PC Program.

CCUs are earned across three categories of activities:

- Webinars (10 units over three years via 10 hours of webinars)
- Volunteering (10 units over three years via 10 hours of volunteering)
- Publishing (10 units over three years via three published pieces)

Each category of activity can only account for 10 units over the three-year reporting period to ensure that individuals demonstrate skills across the range of activities.

### i. Webinars

Webinars work on an hour-by-hour basis for CCUs, up to a maximum of three units per single webinar. So, a two-hour webinar equals two CCUs. Over the three-year credentialing period, webinars can count for no more than 10 CCUs in total. Information on upcoming webinars will be shared with PC Pros and publicised via the AWS website and newsletter. These webinars will enable Professionally Credentialed Individuals to continually develop their AWS skill set and knowledge of the AWS System.

### ii. Volunteering

Volunteering also works on an hour-by-hour basis for CCUs, up to a maximum of three units per single volunteer event. This means that a full day of volunteering only counts as three CCUs. Putting water stewardship into practice is at the heart of being part of the AWS PC Program and one way to ensure all Professionally Credentialed Individuals have practical experience applying water stewardship is through volunteering. Qualifying opportunities can range from *pro bono* support of an AWS project to participating in some type of community-related activity associated with water stewardship (such as river cleanups) and community education efforts on the importance of water conservation.

### iii. Publishing

Over the three-year credential period, individuals are required to publish three articles, and we recommend this is done as one published piece per year. In year one and two, each publication counts as three units, and in year three, the publication will count as four units. This is in recognition of the final year being the 'most advanced' in the credential period, and expectation that this publication is likely to reflect the individual's enhanced knowledge of water stewardship and the AWS System. Over three years, this means that publishing accounts for 10 CCUs, allowing it to make up one third of the total activity, in line with the Program requirements.

Qualifying pieces for publishing include articles, blogs, newsletters and significant social media posts/articles (such as via LinkedIn). Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are not acceptable for publication. These can be posted by the individual on media they control or posted on third-party sites. Each piece must highlight some aspect of the AWS System and/or projects affiliated with AWS and/or AWS members and each piece must be at least 500 words in length.

**Note:** published pieces must include the following statement: “*The content herein is the author’s opinion and not published on behalf of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS). The author holds an AWS Professional Credential and this piece of publishing helps fulfil their Continuing Contribution Units requirements. For more information about AWS or the AWS Professional Credentialing Program please visit <https://a4ws.org/>.*”

## REPORTING CREDENTIAL MAINTENANCE

Professionally Credentialed Individuals will use the PC Portal to report CCUs and maintain their credential account profile.

Failure to fulfill and/or report the required CCUs for the credentialing reporting period will result in expiration of the credential subject to the terms and conditions that follow in this section.

Professionally Credentialed Individuals may appeal CCU interpretations or claims AWS denies. See Section 12 below for more information.

## EXTENSIONS

If unforeseen circumstances prevent a Professionally Credentialed Individual from being able to complete credential maintenance in the three-year reporting period, they may request an extension. Written requests with supporting documentation must be received at least 30 days before the end of the reporting period. AWS reviews requests on a case-by-case basis and only grants extensions in extraordinary situations where you were prevented from completing your ongoing credentialing requirements.

## 8. FEES

Candidates will be required to pay for each level of AWS Training and its related credentialing exam. Candidates will pay the AWS Training Instructors directly in order to attend AWS Foundation, Advanced or Specialist Training. If trainees choose to take the relevant exam for the desired level of credential, that exam fee will be paid upon initial entry into the PC Portal. Also, at the time of initial entry into the PC Portal, and then at the beginning of each year during the three-year credentialing period, Professionally Credentialed Individuals will need to pay an annual maintenance fee. Note that some CCU Webinars may require payment of fees.

The fee schedule is as follows:

- Foundation Level Credentialing Exam = £15.00 GBP
- Advanced Level Credentialing Exam = £15.00 GBP
- Specialist Level Credentialing Exam = £15.00 GBP
- PC Program Annual Maintenance Fee = £75.00 GBP

Failure to pay PC-related fees within 45 days of due notice will result in a temporary suspension of the individual’s participation in the PC Program. If the individual does not pay all due fees in full within 60 days of first notice, then all credentials will be removed from that individual and they are removed from the PC Program. If the individual wishes to re-join the PC Program, they must pay all outstanding fees and send a written request to the PC Program Administrator who will decide whether to allow them to re-join.

## 9. EXPIRATION

AWS professional credentials will expire if the credential holder fails to complete the CCU requirements or pay any associated fees due in accordance with Section 8 (Fees) and Section 10 (Renewal).

## 10. RENEWAL

Assuming the Professionally Credentialed Individual fulfills all CCU requirements in the three-year period and has paid in full all fees due to AWS, renewal for another three-year credentialing period will be

automatic. The renewed credentialing period will start one day after the end of the previous three-year reporting period. Professionally Credentialed Individuals who renew their credential will be notified upon log-in of the need to pay the first annual fee as part of the renewed credentialing period. All terms and conditions as described above for initial entry and payment into the PC Portal remain the same for renewals (Section 8, Fees).

For individual's whose credentials lapsed due to failure to fulfil their CCU requirements, they may apply for reinstatement into the program at the last level of their highest attained credential if: 1) within six months of the lapse, they pass the relevant exam and pay the associated fee of the last level of credential attained; and 2) they pay a reinstatement fee of £50.00 GBP.

An individual who had credentials removed for failure to pay fees on time may be reinstated If they pay all outstanding fees and send a written request to the PC Program Administrator who will decide whether to allow them to re-join/ If approved to do so, they must 1) pay all unpaid fees in whole; 2) take the exam associated with their last level of attained credential; and 3) pay a reinstatement fee of £50.00 GBP.

## 11. AUDITS

AWS will audit a percentage of all credential holders at regular intervals to ensure that they have the documentation to substantiate their reported CCUs. AWS reserves the right to review any reported CCUs at any time. If you are selected for an audit, AWS will ask the PC Individual to verify completed activities with the appropriate documentation. It is recommended the individual retain documentation of all CCUs earned.

Failure to comply will result in disciplinary action including suspension or termination of active credentialed status. See Section 6 for more information.

## 12. APPEALS

The individual has the right to appeal any action regarding the PC Program in accordance with the AWS complaints and appeals procedure which can be viewed here: <https://a4ws.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AWS-Comments-Complaints-and-Appeals-Procedure-V1-0-Feb-2017.pdf>.